

The Way I Am

by myria-chan

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Summary: For Kuroken Weekend It was Kenma Kozume's long standing belief that there is absolutely nothing romantic about falling in love with him. Enter Tetsurou Kuroo.

The Way I Am

**Disclaimer: **I do not own the characters.

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><p>Their love story was not one for the books.<p>

It was good mornings on rainy days, written letters in a time of multimedia communication, side-by-side walks back to each other's homes, tying of each other's shoelaces, and early text messages to remember to eat breakfast.

There was a lack of fireworks, waterworks, sparkles and thumping heartbeats.

But it existed, and that's what mattered.

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><p>It was Kenma Kozume's long standing belief that there was absolutely nothing romantic about falling in love with him.<p>

He's too short, his fishbone arms could't be of used to pick up any lover, his idea of a good time involved staying at home all day, preferably locked in his room, engrossed with virtual life and the reality of his fantasies, and he's too engraved in his own insecurities to begin to take care of another human being.

Love was supposedly selfless, with pledges of mutual affection, gifts and flowers, bright smiles, sunshine, and everything beautiful in

this world.

What he had to offer was his rare share of dueling cards, his lack of interest for social responsibility, and seemingly endless rumination of over his crippling social anxiety issues, bordered by isolation and trepidation.

Not that he minded, no.

No one would ever love him, so he learned to shut the world through his video games and cards the same way the world shut him away from its societal standards.

Enter Tetsurou Kuroo.

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><p>Like a wick of flame on a dying ember, their friendship rekindled a vital part of his personhood of which he couldn't name—"something he could live without, but still feel empty inside with its loss.<p>

This probably what it meant with finding your better half.

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><p>Kenma's lasting memory of Kuroo was this little boy neighbor with eyes sharpened by intelligence and cunning wit and hair styled in an unruly I-just-got-out-of-bed-and-can't-find-my-comb-swear fashion, barging into Kenma's little room as if he owned it, and dragging the owner for another volleyball session.<p>

It bothered Kenma, for a little while, that his parents offered no qualm whatsoever at the young boy's lack of respect for personal space and exploits on breach of property. They must really want Kenma out of the house that bad.

For a little while, Kenma didn't understand Kuroo too. Even at a young age, he was lanky, wiry, and slow and engaging in extreme physical activities like running, and climbing up of trees was not his cup of coffee. He made it a point to include that into his introductions. The neighborhood kids didn't take his sincerity very well.

It was disappointing. Kenma holed up in his room after that.

But Kuroo was different.

He pulled Kenma out of the comforts of his fortress and made it a lifetime commitment to tear down all of Kenma's walls.

"Don't you find me weird?" Kenma asked, tossing the ball to Kuroo's direction in time for the attack. The connection was a solid whack that sent the blow two feet away from them.

Kuroo grinned. "I think the word you should be using is interesting." Kuroo left that statement hover as he went to fetch their ball back, to which he asked Kenma, "Aren't you having fun?"

Kenma considered it for a while and shrugged. "I don't particularly

feel anything for it." Volleyball wasn't bad, but it didn't thrill him in all honesty.

Kuroo's grin widened. "But you don't want to be left alone, right?" Golden eyes looked up and locked to his own, the presence of surprise this time did not bother to hide behind the curtain of brown fringes. "Volleyball is the ultimate team sport. You take on different roles and use everything you've got to send the ball on the other side of the court. For everything you lack, people will cover you for it. You can't win by yourself alone. Everything depends on your resiliency to stay connected for the team. That kind of modesty and humility isn't found on every sport."

"Those kids from our block, they want to play games that are flashy and stuff. Something they're sure they'll win and be the best. But you're different. You just want a place to belong. Even if you always get picked last, you'll always be on the line. I think that's interesting." Kuroo tosses him the ball, a boyish grin back into place after the lengthy speech, and Kenma caught it. "As long as you play volleyball, you'll never feel lonely."

"You're weird."

Kuroo's grin widened once more. "I think the word you should be using is interesting."

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><p>It was the presence that attracted him the mostâ€"commanding, assertive, yet warm and inviting as you draw closeâ€"the complete opposite of his subservient passiveness; energies on opposite poles magnetized.<p>

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><p>Conversations were awkward.<p>

For one, Kenma was not one who would initiate a suitable topic for anything. Secondly, if the conversation did start, he didn't know how to reply. A single question could generate three thousand nine hundred and sixty five responses from himâ€"that was three thousand and nine hundred and sixty five simulations running through his head at the same time. And by the time he reached to the appropriate response (depending on the personality of the person he's talking to, of course), the silence had already stretched to a boring extent and he had lost the chance of conversation.

Thirdly, eye contactâ€"why do people think it's necessary?

There were thousands of precipitating factors in understanding human reaction. There's muscle movement, intonation and deflection of the voice, fidgety habits and quirks, lags and delays, language used, wordplay, and the list go on. One could simply dissect a person's interest to a certain topic through the use of these minute factors. But when it came down to it, people always blamed others for the lack of eye contact.

It's scary and uncomfortable, this societal norm of staring deeply into one's eyes. The eyes were the bearers of one's soul. With a simple eye contact, one could simply peer deeply to someone's

innermost thought, divulging the very foundation of their being at your disposal.

For those reason, Kenma was truly thankful of Kuroo's presence.

Kuroo could understand him, breaching through a realm that was untouched by words, sounds and contact.

When he's thirsty, Kuroo's there with a bottle of mineral water waiting for him at the end of practice. When he's tired after grueling hours of afternoon practice, Kuroo ushered him for a piggy-back ride all the way to home. When the conversation turned sour and uncomfortable, Kuroo didn't make a big deal about it. Instead, he lightened the mood with today's fanciful events, his trademark sardonic commentary lacing through the jests of it all: Lev's pathetic excuse of receiving and serving, Taketora-san's frustrating habit to burst into dramatic flares every now and then, Yaku-san's height, his ridiculous bed hair.

As club hours dwindled and their volleyball family dispersed back to their respective homes, Kuroo settled at his side a little closer, walked at a leisurely pace to match with Kenma's, and did not speak until Kenma revealed what was bothering him.

Kuroo was always patient. Kuroo was always considerate. Kuroo was always understanding.

To him, at least.

"Why are you this nice to me?" was their conversation at one time during some summer day, the rain was a heavy downpour. Kenma forgot to bring his umbrella, and Kuroo offered to share his own as they brave the elements.

The shower and wind curtained them against questioning intruders as Kenma struggled at keeping the umbrella streamlined above their heads, riding piggy-back on broad shoulders. He meant to ask it to the wind, but their current position denounced his intentions.

"I'm always this nice to everyone," was Kuroo's defense, looked back and cackled at the incredulous look crossing Kenma's face. "Define nice."

Kenma burrowed his face on one shoulder, and cocked his head so he could read Kuroo's eyes. What stared back at him were blank mirrors of endless nothingness.

"You make me seem indispensable," Kenma tried.

"You are." Kuroo smiled, the one that was genuine, uninhibited, and would make an outsider think he was possessed by dark magic.

Kenma thought it made him most handsome, even with his ridiculous bed hair.

* * *

><p>He found it uncanny to seamlessly fit in a world of stark contrast to his nature, experiencing trajectories life had to offer,

finding meaning in absurdities, defending irrationality, and letting with emotions flow.<p>

* * *

><p>Kuroo's like a string, a scarlet red one, connecting him to different aspects of humanity long had he forgotten to be connected to.<p>

Kuroo used a lot of things: Let's play volleyball, There's this new technique I saw on TV I'd like us to try, Nekoma High's closer to our home; subjects were always different, but Kuroo always used the words us, we, and our all the time. And every time, he introduced Kenma to a myriad of colorful personalities.

Kenma's personal favorite was the current members of his volleyball team. They were a bunch of hot-blooded shenanigans that were as hardworking and competent as they were noisy and exhilarating. With them, Kenma believed that there was a reason for keeping the ball in play.

The team believed in him, always made sure that the ball landed to where he was. It was refreshing, because it happened at a time when believing in himself was Kenma's least of priorities.

But still he couldn't help but thinkâ€|

"If I die, the world will move on eventually," Kenma said to nothing in particular, lying on the opposite end of his bed, face dangerously close to Kuroo's feet, pausing his game as his character died for the thirty seventh time that night.

Life, unlike his games, had no reset button and save points. The game was over the moment death caught you. For a time, the persons you defined as loved ones would mourn, but in the end what you were, who you chose to be would be buried six feet under.

Not that Kenma was thinking of joining the dead soon. Nevertheless, he found great importance in the awareness that everything ended and nothing would remain staticâ€"as narcissistic, depressive, and suicidal it sounded.

Kuroo looked up from the book he's reading, and replied, "I wouldn't."

"But you'll pretend toâ€| move on, that is."

"Ah yesâ€| I'll smile if they want me to; joke if they force me to. I'll bottle all my tears from your wake to your funeral. On the outside, I'll be a pillar of support and ask everyone to celebrate your life rather than to commemorate your death. Hell, I'll even lend someone a shoulder if they need to cry about you. But inside," a pause; a long finger pointed at the left side of his chest, and continued, "My heart is but a beating carcass."

"You're overdramatizing again, Kuroo."

But in his heart, Kenma knew it was the truth.

Kenma rose up and crawledâ€"prowled was more of the termâ€"on hands

and bent knees, and settled on the lump that was Kuroo's chest. Under him was a strong and steady heartbeat, and the scent of freshly laundered shirt assaulted his senses.

It surprised him at first that he could only show this side to Kuroo. Like a cat waiting to be spoiled.

But Kuroo didn't touch him, with his hands at least. He stretched against the sheets, lazy and deliberate, legs unfurled and bent, his right foot resting against half-raised left leg, a hand crept to cradle his hyperextended neck on the pillows, arched back slightly and relaxedâ€"his most comfortable positionâ€"eyes darting back to his reading.

Kenma rubbed his cheek against the shirt, body curling, and pressed against the buttons of his console. "You love me, don't you?"

Kuroo stiffened, but the rumble that came out had its usual esteemed tone. A crafty follow-up was sure to ensue.

"What gave me away? The doting looks, the warm smiles, or my needy extroverted ways to catch your every attention?"

Kuroo was trying to act cool again. "You just do," he answered, nestling deeper, the entirety of his right arm resting on the broad expanse of muscular chest. Kuroo appeared lanky because of his posture, but underneath his shirt, he was all hard muscles and mass. The same hard muscled built that pushed his trite existence to happy days.

It was in the way Kuroo urged him to play volleyball, took his time to motivate Kenma in not quitting the team, the way Kuroo made his position as a setter a grand thing, the silent trips to and fro wherever they might fancy, the way when they walk, Kuroo was always a heartbeat away.

For a childhood friend, Kuroo was investing his time a lot. Kenma must really be that important.

He was starting to believe in that too.

"Do you want me to love you back?"

"That was the plan." Kuroo let go of the pretense of reading, and smirked. "But it's your choice, Kenma, always. It will always be your choice. I can't take that away from you." Although his voice was of gentleness, Kuroo's eyes were menacing, cunning and provocative; meaning to eat him alive by every passing minute.

It was adorable of him.

* * *

><p>Because he was loved, he didn't need the extravagances to prove it. The littlest habits were their luxury, and the time spent together was their treasure.<p>

* * *

><p>Friendship. Relationship. Whatever this ship was, the whole

Nekoma Volleyball Team seemed to be on board and ready for sailing. To protect the goods, they circled around the couple like a sea of mountain lions, ready to hiss and scratch at the slightest of acerbic remarks.<p>

"Allow me to educate you with the evolving classifications of human sexuality." Yaku-san cracked his fingers in further emphasis that he did not need a reply.

"You want us to be offended by perfection?" asked Yuuki-kun with the brightest of his smiles.

Inuoka-kun would pat that person's shoulder in sympathy. "It's okay. You'll eventually find someone who will love you for everything you chose to be."

"Kenma is a very competent setter. Kuroo is a very reliable blocker and spiker. If you know what I mean." Kai-san's eyebrows wiggled in a salacious manner. "Care to be enlightened?"

Taketora-san advised. "You'll be kicked by a horse. But that's after we skin you alive."

Fukunaga simply ignored the offender's existence. Words were too precious.

"Eh? I was born and raised in Japan. Why would you ask my honest opinion as a Russian on the subject matter?" Lev had to ask though, "Say, Yaku-san, looking at Kuroo-san and Kenma-san, don't you sometimes feel like the husband of the family has cheated you in favor of your favorite son?"

So far they still hadn't found an answer for that question, not that they were looking, of course.

* * *

><p>He had a natural inclination to wander (like a cat), and still found it absolutely surprising that his better half managed to track him down (also, like a cat).<p>

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><p>"You could mail him back, you know," Kuroo said over his shoulder, glancing on Shouyou's third message of the day, resting his chin on said shoulder as if it belonged there. "It'll give you a better idea of how he speaks in real life, like a simulation. You might enjoy it, talking to the shrimp, that is."<p>

Kenma's eyebrows furrowed slightly. "Aren't you jealous?"

"As hell," Kuroo answered immediately, "but you should do the things because you want it, not because I want it."

"What do you want, then?"

"I want you to love yourself as much as I love you, if that is even remotely possible."

In the end, he did mailed Shouyou back later that day in the confines

of his own room, and did found it enjoyable, the same way he found volleyball enjoyable these days.

Lately, he also found himself going out more, stretching the minutes so he could hang out with his teammates, his text messages getting longer and lengthier compared to his usual one liner replies, started to notice the color of everyone's face and began to remember people's faces in detail, and in some days, his console managed to survive the day without being plugged to the nearest outlet.

The changes didn't bother him.

It was the thought that the changes not bothering him that was unnerving.

He was slowly turning into someone he never thought he would be, yet the very core of his existentiality remained intact. This was probably what they meant when they said comfortable in your own skin.

The unsaid commentary remained to drive him mad, but now, with confidence and enthusiasm, he understood that there would always his people who would remind him who he was and how he fitted in to this world; one particularly with a stylistic bed hair.

That was how it started being mutual.

* * *

><p>He began to love himself a bit better, slowly and surely, as slow and as sure as everyday he spent not alone.<p>

* * *

><p>"I want to love you back," Kenma said it casually, like it was an everyday drag as opposed to a love confession, on the tournament locker rooms, the air filled with the heat and sweat of teenage volleyball players, in the presence of their own volleyball team, conversations within earshot.<p>

Kenma shifted to properly look at Kuroo, who paused midway in changing clothes, black sweatshirt held up revealing the fine tones of well sculpted muscles, head angled to peer down at Kenma quizzically, surprise written all over his faceâ€"eyebrows shot up, slack jawed, with traceable patterns of surprise, incredulity and amazement in his eyes.

Kenma frowned at that and slammed his locker door a little more forceful than necessary, avoiding Kuroo's gaze all together. "Why do you look so surprised? That was your plan, right?"

Kuroo remained silent for a full minute. Kenma bit his lips for it. It was a big deal for him. Maybe Kuroo didn't feel the same anymore. Maybe he got tired of taking care of him. The uncomfortable feeling of starting a one-sided relationship resurfaced, the pits of his stomach brewing a familiar concoction of anxiety, apprehension, and aggravation, making his head hurt and his heart heavy.

He was all in expectance of Kuroo's smile, his laughter even, and probably they'd hug and hold hands like one of those scenes in the

shoujo manga Shouyo showed him one time, looking forward to Kuroo's reaction when Kenma call him Tetsurou finally. Maybe he wasn't really cut out for romance like he thought he already was.

"I think you stunned him, Kenma," Yaku-san pulled him out of his dark thoughts, and into the light of his bright smile. But what was his sunny disposition to Kenma reduced to the thundercloud he put up as he turned to Kuroo, a dark scowl marring his features as he smacked the captain back to reality. "Pull yourself together, embarrassment."

The rest of the team snickered, shuffling out of the room before pandemonium could erupt.

Kuroo sputtered incoherently for a moment, torn between chasing after the team and coming up with a quirky reply on Kenma. He settled for Kenma, instead, because the outward confession was more important than the angry burning mark on his back and the bruises on his manly pride.

Clearing his throat, he arranged his shirt and grabbed for his things in that short order. "There's this bakeshop near school with a badass apple pie I want you to try out. We can go tomorrow, if you want."

Kenma nodded in reply, eyes downcast, feigning fascination on his feet. In retrospect, this particularly wasn't their first date, but it was notably the first invitation where Kenma began counting their numbers. Excited, he found himself looking forward to tomorrow, to their infinity and the absolute uncertainty of it, because he was not facing it alone.

"I don't know what happens after this," Kenma said as they stepped out of the vicinity and into the dusk of another day, to no one in particular, to the setting sun mostly, as he was used to speaking everything to nothing.

"Why don't we find out together?"

The entire team made gagging sounds at the back of their throats at their captain's half-hearted attempt on romance. Kuroo made them run all the way back to school for it.

And sunset never looked brighter.

* * *

><p>*For Taketora-san's reaction, there is an ancient proverb in Japan that if you stand against true love you'll be kicked by a horse. (Ouch!)<p>

* Lying scene inspired by this.
post/89736261694/bluehairedmullet-hq-1-please-do-not

* Significantly inspired by The Way I Am by Ingrid Michaelson. Listen here: watch?v=jJOzdLwvTHA

I wanted to explore Kenma's social anxiety but ultimately chickened out by the middle of it. It hits close to home so much. There is also supposed to be a continuation planned out, but ran out of time.

Hopefully the sequel will be finished before the month ends. ^_~
Because Kuroken is absolute love. Aren't they perfect for each other?

Hope everyone enjoyed this! Please continue supporting the fantastic series that is Haikyuu! We are truly blessed, because this is one of those series that explores the competitive atmosphere of the sports genre while exploiting humanities differing nuances and intricacies.

'Til next time!

End
file.